

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended) A safety scalpel, comprising:

a blade ~~[[hav]]~~including an orifice disposed between a ~~sharp~~ front cutting end and a rear blunt end, said front and rear ends being disposed substantially in the same plane;

a handle including with a front portion and a rear portion, said front portion being adapted to receive said rear blunt end of said blade and securely engage said blade via said orifice; and

a ~~substantially hollow~~ housing configured to retain internally said blade and slide back and forth onto said front handle portion between a first position in which said ~~sharp~~ front cutting end of said blade is fully exposed for operational use and a second position in which said ~~sharp~~ front cutting end of said blade is fully enclosed within said housing for safety, said blade being securely engaged by said front handle portion via said orifice in said first and second positions~~[[;]]~~, said housing including on different sides respectively a sliding movement activator ~~on said blade housing;~~ and a blade disengaging actuator ~~on said blade housing~~, said actuator configured to disengage said blade from said front handle portion when said ~~blade~~ housing is in said second position.

Claims 2 – 24 (canceled)

Claim 25 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 1, wherein said blade disengaging actuator is ~~integrally formed on said blade housing proximate to said sliding movement activator~~ adapted to flex at a first end.

Claim 26 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 1, wherein said rear handle ~~has a rear grasping portion~~ is adapted for hand grasping.

Claim 27 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 1, wherein said front handle portion is equipped with at least one groove ~~adapted for coupling to said blunt end of said blade~~ configured to fit into said blade orifice.

Claim 28 (canceled)

Claim 29 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 2[[8]]7, wherein said front handle portion is further equipped with at least one guide channel, said at least one guide channel being flanked on one side by an integral locking bar ~~on said front handle portion.~~

Claim 30 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 29, wherein said ~~blade~~ housing is adapted internally to slide within said at least one guide channel when activated.

Claim 31 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim ~~[[28]]~~30, wherein said ~~front handle portion~~ sliding movement activator includes a ~~blade~~ stop member at a first end, said stop member being adapted to lock said housing at opposite ends of said locking bar, said locked housing being respectively in one of said first and second positions ~~in spaced relation to said at least one groove, said blade stop configured to limit the advance of said blunt end of said blade when said blade is being securely engaged by said front handle portion.~~

Claim 32 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 3~~[[0]]~~1, wherein said ~~sliding movement activator~~ includes a stop member is further adapted to ~~lock said blade housing at opposite ends of said locking bar and~~ unlock said housing and slide within said at least one guide channel when said sliding movement activator is pressed toward said locking bar in one of said first and second positions.

Claim 33 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 2~~[[8]]~~5, wherein said blade disengaging actuator is adapted at a second end to push ~~contacts~~ said internally retained blade ~~when said blade disengaging actuator is pushed toward said front handle portion~~ when said blade housing is in said second position, said ~~contact~~ push causing

said blade to disengage from said front handle portion ~~while said blade housing is in~~
~~said second position~~, said second end being disposed substantially opposite said first
flexing end.

Claim 34 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 33, wherein said
disengaged blade is retained internally by said ~~blade~~ housing for safety.

Claim 35 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 34, wherein said ~~blade~~
housing ~~with said internally retained and disengaged blade~~ is decoupled from said
handle by sliding said ~~blade~~ housing away from said at least one groove on said front
handle portion.

Claim 36 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 34, wherein said blade
is retained internally by said ~~blade~~ housing via a plurality of integral blade retaining
members.

Claim 37 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 36, wherein said
plurality of integral blade retaining members includes at least two members adapted to
frictionally retain said ~~blunt~~ rear end of said blade within said ~~blade~~ housing.

Claim 38 (currently amended) The safety scalpel of Claim 36, wherein said plurality of integral blade retaining members includes at least one member adapted to frictionally engage said blade orifice ~~of said blade~~ within said ~~blade~~ housing.

Claim 39 (canceled)

Claim 40 (new) The safety scalpel of Claim 31, wherein said sliding movement activator is adapted to flex at a second end, said second flexing end being disposed substantially opposite said stop member at said first end.

Claim 41 (new) A safety scalpel, comprising:

a surgical blade;

a handle with a first portion adapted to engage said surgical blade, said first handle portion being equipped with at least one guide channel; and

a housing configured to retain internally said surgical blade, said housing including:

at least one interior stabilizing rail adapted to slide back and forth in said at least one guide channel of said first handle portion between a first position in which said surgical blade is exposed for operational use and a second position in which said surgical blade is fully enclosed within said housing for safety, said surgical blade being securely engaged by said first handle portion in said first and second positions;

a sliding movement activator; and

a blade disengaging actuator configured to operate independently of said sliding movement activator, said sliding movement activator and said blade disengaging actuator being hinged respectively to adjacent sides of said housing.

Claim 42 (new) The safety scalpel of Claim 41, wherein said hinged actuator is configured to disengage said surgical blade from said first handle portion when said housing is in said second position.

Claim 43 (new) The safety scalpel of Claim 41, wherein said surgical blade includes:

a front cutting end;

a rear end; and

an orifice between said front and rear ends, said front and rear ends being disposed substantially in the same plane.

Claim 44 (new) The safety scalpel of Claim 41, wherein said surgical blade is completely enclosed by said housing for safety when said housing is decoupled from said first handle portion.

Claim 45 (new) The safety scalpel of Claim 35, wherein said blade is completely enclosed by said housing for safety when said housing is decoupled from said front handle portion.

Claim 46 (new). A safety scalpel, comprising:

a blade;

a handle with a first portion adapted to engage said blade, said first handle portion including:

a locking bar; and

at least one guide channel being flanked on one side by said locking bar;

and

a housing configured to retain internally said blade, said housing including:

at least one stabilizing rail adapted to slide back and forth in said at least one guide channel of said first handle portion between a first position in which said blade is exposed for operational use and a second position in which said blade is fully enclosed within said housing for safety, said blade being securely engaged by said first handle portion in said first and second positions;

a sliding movement activator adapted at one end to lock said housing at opposite ends of said locking bar to prevent surgical accidents, said locked housing being respectively in one of said first and second positions; and

a blade disengaging actuator configured to operate independently of said sliding movement activator, said sliding movement activator and said blade

disengaging actuator being integrally formed respectively on different sides of said housing for operational safety.

Claim 47 (new) A safety scalpel, comprising:

a blade;

a handle having a longitudinal axis and being adapted at one end to securely engage said blade, said handle including:

a locking bar being substantially parallel to said longitudinal axis; and

at least one guide channel being flanked on one side by said locking bar;

and

a housing configured to retain internally said blade, said housing including:

at least one stabilizing rail adapted to slide back and forth in said at least one guide channel between a first position in which said blade is exposed for operational use and a second position in which said blade is fully enclosed within said housing for safety, said blade being securely engaged by said handle in said first and second positions;

a sliding movement activator integrally formed on a first side of said housing and adapted to lock said housing at opposite ends of said locking bar, said locked housing being respectively in one of said first and second positions; and

an actuator integrally formed on a second side of said housing and configured to disengage said blade from said handle when said housing is in said

second position, said first and second sides of said housing lying next to each other.

Claim 48 (new) A safety scalpel, comprising:

a blade including a front cutting end, a substantially straight rear end, and an orifice operatively disposed between said front and rear ends;

a handle having a longitudinal axis and being adapted at one end to securely engage said blade via said orifice, said handle including:

a locking bar being substantially parallel to said longitudinal axis; and

at least one guide channel being flanked on one side by said locking bar;

and

a housing configured to retain internally said blade, said housing including:

at least one stabilizing rail adapted to slide back and forth in said at least one guide channel between a first position in which said front cutting end of said blade is exposed for operational use and a second position in which said blade is fully enclosed within said housing for safety, said substantially straight rear end of said blade being enclosed within said housing when said housing is in said first position;

a sliding movement activator integrally formed on a first side of said housing and adapted to lock said housing at opposite ends of said locking bar, said locked housing being respectively in one of said first and second positions; and

an actuator integrally formed on a second side of said housing and
configured to disengage said blade from said handle when said housing is in said
second position, said first and second sides of said housing lying next to each
other.